

DDS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER INITIATIVE HIGHLIGHTS MAY 2003

The DDS Autism Spectrum Disorder Initiative was created in response to the increasing numbers of persons diagnosed with autism served by the Department of Developmental Services. There are four stated goals of the initiative:

- **POLICY:** to establish and carry out comprehensive public policy on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of autism spectrum disorder.
- **PRACTICE:** to identify and promote best practices in assessment and diagnosis, treatment, education and training.
- **PARTNERS:** to promote partnerships, both public and private, for research and practice.
- **INFORMATION:** to provide current, updated information to families and practitioners.

The DDS Autism Initiative has produced the following results since 1997:

- In 1997, the Department co-published with the California Department of Education, *Best Practices for Designing and Delivering Effective Programs for Individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorders*. This document outlines best practice procedures for designing intervention programs.
- In 1999, and at the request of the Legislature, the Department released its report on the growing population of persons with ASD in California. This report documented the rapid rise in the number of persons identified with ASD and established a legitimate need for research into the cause of the increase.
- In 1999, the Department established a contract with the U.C. Davis Medical Center to conduct an epidemiological study to determine the cause(s) of the rise in the number of persons with autism in California.
- In 2001, the Department awarded and then coordinated a Wellness grant to the Northern California Autism Collaborative to develop Best Practice Guidelines for evaluation and assessment of children birth to five years of age.
- In 2001, the Department established an expert advisory panel, known as the Director's Advisory Committee on Autistic Spectrum Disorders, to give the Department advice on developing best practice procedures for evaluation and intervention services.
- In 2002, the Department, in collaboration with the Northern California Autism Collaborative, the Association of Regional Center Agencies and the Director's Advisory Committee on Autistic Spectrum Disorders,

published a 180-page document entitled *Autistic Spectrum Disorders Best Practice Guidelines For Screening, Diagnosis And Assessment*.

- In 2002, the Department was successful in augmenting the regional center budget for FY 2002/03 by \$17.2 million for services to persons with ASD. This budget increase was calculated to adjust for projected increases of persons with ASD for one fiscal year.
- In 2002, the Department initiated a statewide training, support and technical assistance program called the ASD Learning Collaborative for regional centers, special education, health providers and community-based professionals that serve the regional centers, on evaluation and assessment of persons with ASD.
- In 2002, the Department enhanced and expanded access to basic information about autism by publishing and posting on its website quarterly reports, the Fact Book (fifth edition) and other informative publications on ASD.
- In 2002, the Department began and has continued to offer data, ongoing technical consultation and support for several multimillion-dollar research efforts at California universities and government health agencies investigating the biological causes of ASD. Most notably, these include the Childhood Autism Risk from Genetics and the Environment (CHARGE) study, a study of the causes for autism and developmental delay; and, the Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE) study to establish an epidemiologic surveillance system and conduct epidemiologic studies of autism and other developmental disabilities among children in California.
- In 2003, the Department joined with the UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute and the Center for Health & Technology to implement a rural telehealth project to enhance mental health services for children with autism in rural communities.
- In 2003, the Department released a four-year update report of the 1999 Autism Report to better inform families, regional centers, legislators, researchers and the public about the population of persons with ASD in California.